

Q and A

He Claims U.S. Aids Old Nazis

Howard Blum, a former staff writer for the Village Voice, is the author of "Wanted," a book that accuses the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service of protecting Nazi war criminals who have settled in this country and covering up their misdeeds. He was interviewed by Washington Star Staff Writer Ned Schorff.

Question: How many war criminals do we have living in this country? Is there one around every corner?

Blum: I wouldn't say there's one around every corner, but according to the most recent list, issued by the immigration service, there are 143 alleged Nazi war criminals. The immigration service seems to be very good at making lists but not so good about bringing these cases into the courtroom. People on this lists, however, are probably just the tip of the iceberg. These are people who did not change their names. These are people who we know about. There are probably many others. But what is more significant than how many there are specifically here is the number of how many Nazis we've actually deported, and that number after all these years remains just one — Hermine Braunsteiner Ryan.

Q: Why did we deport that one?

A: Because it was a case the immigration service could not forget about, I think. They could not forget about the pressure of the press and because of Jewish groups and because of the work of Tony DeVito and Vincent Schiano, the two investigators

assigned to the immigration service's first Ryan case in 1964. They did not begin any sort of proceedings against her until 1972, eight years later, and then only when they realized that the people in this country and the press either would not or could not forget.

Q: What sort of lives do Nazi war criminals live in this country? Are they haunted people, are they typical average Americans?

A: In many cases, some Nazis are the archtypical American, good neighbor, first to rake his lawn. Bishop Valerian Trifa is a man who controls 10 churches — a man who is accused of bringing former Iron Guards into this country and making them priests. The 1941 Iron Guard Revolt in Yugoslavia was more a pogrom than a revolt. Jews were slaughtered in the streets. Their necks were slit. They were allowed to bleed to death in a mockery of the Jewish ritual of kosher slaughtering. When Trifa came to this country himself he was not even a priest, he was just a history teacher, and without even becoming a priest he was appointed a bishop, which is another interesting question. Another, Andrija Artukovic — the former minister of the interior of Croatia, the man who signed decrees that established the concentration camps which exterminated hundreds of thousands of people — has lived for 20 years in Southern California in a beachfront bungalow. I once confronted Mr. Artukovic, I met him on the beach, near his house and he was walking on the surf. As I approached him, he noticed me and tried to get away, but I said, 'Wait a minute Mr. Artukovic, I'd like to ask you a question,' and he started shaking and then he started shouting, 'Please don't kill me, please don't kill me, I know you're from the JDL.'

Q: The Jewish Defense League?

A: Yes. And no matter how I tried to reassure him that I had no intention of killing him, that I was just a reporter trying to ask him a few questions, he would not stop shaking or trembling. So in fact men like Mr. Artukovic do live with some sort of fear and are in effect being existentially, at least, punished for what they have done. But people will tell me, for example, in the case of Boleslavs Maikovskis, an alleged Nazi war criminal who lives in Mineola, Long Island, 'Why don't you leave him alone, he's a nice old man, he even keeps an American flag on his door.' But another of the men in my book is a Holocaust who helped gather the information on Maikovskis. He keeps

a larger American flag in his house, about a yard wide, and he keeps it by his bed because each night he has nightmares, each night he relives the past, he sees his mother being pushed into a truck, and sent off to be shot. And he wakes up screaming, and his wife then shows him the American flag, says, 'It's OK, you're in America, there's nothing to worry about.' But lately this doesn't reassure him because the same colossal injustice, incomprehensible injustice, that characterized his life in Europe he feels is characterizing his life in this country because we have allowed these Nazis to remain as free men.

Q: What is your conclusion as to why they are allowed to stay here?

A: My conclusion is that there are many different levels of corruption and also pragmatic alliances. After the war, America seemed to be in a hurry to forget about Nazis, to worry about the new enemy, communism. In the rush to fight these Communists we made pragmatic alliances with former Nazi war criminals. I think that undermined our national morality. There is, though, I think hope for the future in these cases, primarily through the efforts of Congress. Congressman Joshua Eilberg, chairman of the House subcommittee on Immigration, has asked the General Accounting Office to begin an investigation of the immigration service's behavior in the past 20 years in these cases. There're also other indices that makes one wonder about the different levels of government complicity and corruption.

Q: For example?

A: The CIA has been influential in bringing some Nazis into this country. A man, Edgar Lapienkas in San Diego, Calif., has admitted that he was brought into this country by the CIA and that he performed spy missions for the agency in the 1960s and the agency has confirmed this. Other levels of complicity: I think in this cover-up involved the State Department. In the case of Andrija Artukovic, the State Department refuses to send this man back to Yugoslavia to stand trial because 'he will suffer political persecution.' And at one hearing the FBI sent two members of the bureau to the hearing to testify in Mr. Artukovic's behalf as character references.

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